

1st Ind

HEADQUARTERS 14TH ARMORED DIVISION, A.P.O. 446, U.S. Army, 15 May 1945.

TO: Colonel D. H. Hudelson (INF), A.P.O. 446, U.S. Army.

1. For review and comment in connection with Paragraphs 1 and 2, basic Ltr and Incl.

2. For compliance with Paragraph 3, basic Ltr.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL SMITH:



WILLIAM C. GOLDEN
Lt. Col., A. G. D.
Adjutant General

Incl -- n/c

2nd Ind

HEADQUARTERS RESERVE COMMAND, 14TH ARMORED DIVISION, A. P. O. 446, U.S. Army,
16 May 1945.

TO: HEADQUARTERS SEVENTH ARMY, HISTORICAL SECTION, A. P. O. 758, U.S. Army.

1. Changes and comments noted in pencil on basic communication.

2. Paragraph 3, basic ltr. complied with; report covering battle of Hatten was forwarded on 10 May 1945 via of H/C.

D. H. HUDELSON
Colonel, Infantry
Commanding

HUDELSON TASK FORCE

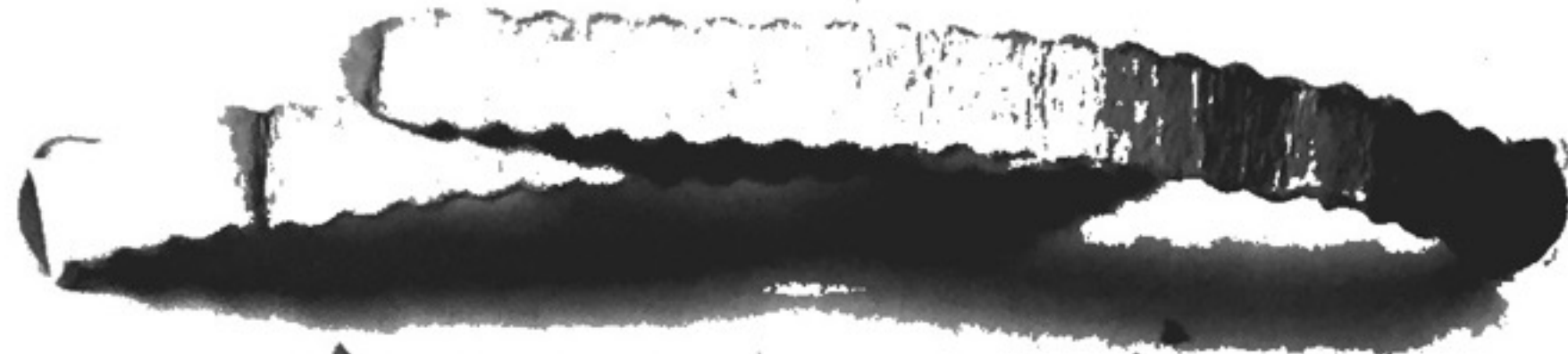
To facilitate the Third Army's regrouping for operations against Von Rundstedt's Ardennes salient, the Seventh Army received orders to extend its boundary. Lt Gen Alexander M. Patch's forces assumed the defensive along an 84 mile front from the Rhine River to the vicinity of Sarrbrucken. The change from offensive to defensive action came to 7th Army officially in the form of a 6th Army Group letter of instructions dated 21 Dec. 44 which emphasized that the Sixth Army Group would be prepared to yield ground rather than to endanger the integrity of its forces. The XV Corps comprised the left flank of the Seventh Army, the VI Corps was positioned on the right.¹

On the VI Corps left flank, holding a frontage of about 10 miles in the lower Vosges*Hardt area was the Task Force Hudelson. This task force had been constituted by VI Corps on 21 December 44 and consisted of Combat Command Reserve, 14th Arm'd Division less one tank battalion; Co. B, 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Co B, 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, Co A, 125th Arm'd Engr Bn, 1-540 Combat Engr, 94th Cav Sqd (-) 62nd AIB and the 117th Cav. Rcn. Sqdr, all under the command of Colonel D. H. Hudelson.²

For a period of 10 days Task Force Hudelson organized its

1 G-3 Report, 7th U.S. Army, 25 Dec '44.

2 History CC "R", 14th Arm'd Div for month of December 1944, dated 9 January 1945.



defensive sector, a line just south of Ritche (Q7749), Rquelshardt (Q 8246), Neunhoffen (Q 9146). Road junctions were prepared with craters and demolitions to make the roads impassable for enemy armor. Timber was felled, with the branches sharpened and pointed in the direction of expected attack. T.N.T. charges were tied to trees which would be blasted to fall across all avenues of approach. Road blocks of tanks and trench system were organized. Anti-tank and personnel mines were strategically placed to supplement concertina wire¹ and trip flares as precautionary defensive measures.

Listening posts were established. Patrols were ordered to take prisoners for ~~identity~~^{identification} of opposing forces and information² regarding enemy positions and intentions.

The 62 AIB was placed on the right of the sector, the 117th Cavalry Squadron on the left and the 94 Cavalry Squadron in the center. The 1st Battalion 540th Engineers was given the mission of maintaining all roads and bridges in the sector and also assume the role of reserve for the Task Force. 500 AFA Battalion supported the task force.

Bitter cold weather of the period did not help the conditions of the men in the "paper thin"³ lines.

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- 1 Personal investigation of terrain.
 - 2 Patrol plans, Hq 62 AIB, History 14th Arm'd Div December 1944.
 - 3 Special Report "German offensive of 1 Jan '45, Sec C/S Hq 7th U.S. Army.

Falling snow and blizzards added to the discomfort and ^{loneliness} ~~longesomeness~~ of forward riflemen whose holes were dug into the frozen ground at distances of 15-20 yards from each other. ¹

Due to the extremely ^{wide} ~~large~~ front it was difficult to organize a continuous defensive line or to give ^{sufficient} ~~any~~ depth to the defense. ² Indications of an enemy attack were not lacking. Aerial observers noted movement of German troops in the few days of flying weather which prevailed during the foggy and rainy month of December. ³ Enemy patrols were active during the period and hostile artillery registration fire on villages and cross roads was reported. G-2 Information revealed that the enemy would attack in force around the first of the year. ⁴

Just before midnight on 31 December 1944 the German offensive struck. The enemy attacked with six divisions, identified along the 7th Army front from east to west as the 256th Volks Grenadiers, 361st ^{559th} Volks Grenadiers, 17th S.S. panzer Grenadiers, 19th and 36th Volks Grenadier Divisions. ⁵

Code name for the attack was "10 May 1940" so called in commemoration of Hitler's entry into France. ⁶ Spearheading the

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- 1 Interview with "C" Co men.
 - 2 Interview with 62 ATR staff.
 - 3 G-3 Report, 7th U.S. Army, Dec 44.
 - 4 G-2 Report, 7th U.S. Army, Dec 44.
 - 5 U.S. 7th Army, G-2 Information Bulletin #44, 10 Jan 45.
 - 6 U.S. 7th Army, G-2 Information Bulletin #44, 10 Jan 45.

drive was the 17th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Division, up to strength and newly fitted. The Division's mission was to break through ^{west of} the eastern slopes of the Hardt mountains and thus secure an opening through which the 21 Panzer Division could exploit into the ^{SAAR} ~~Saar~~ valley from their lurking positions behind the German lines. It was later learned from prisoners of war that the attack also had the objective of spearheading a major breakthrough to act as a diversion for the ^d ~~Belgian~~ ^{Ardenne} offensive, ~~thus relieving the pressure von Rundstedt's forces were receiving in the north and to give a cheap political victory to bolster German morale on the home front.~~ ² ~~Correct~~ ?

About 2400 on 31 December the 62d Battalion C.P., located in Phillipsbourg, received a telephone message that "C" Company was undergoing a severe enemy attack. ² Lt. Col. ^{J.} H. H. Meyers (Comdg 62 AIB) immediately issued instructions for two platoons of Troop A 117th Cav Rcn Sqdn to occupy previously selected positions in "C" Company's area. ³ One of the platoons established a road block at 85.2-44.3 astride the highway which

1 Special Report "German Offensive, 1 Jan 1945" Sec C/S, Hq 7th U.S. Army.

~~2 U.S. 7th Army, 3-2 Information Bulletin #44, 10 Jan 44~~

³ S-3 Journal, 62 AIB 31 Dec 44, 1 Jan 45.

^{3.4} Interview with 62d AIB staff.

ran from ~~Engel~~ Engelhardt to Phillipsbourg. The other platoon was established on the highway just south of Bannstein (vic 832-442)

Meanwhile "C" Co had met the initial enemy attack when the outpost group, positioned in and around the hotel at Lake Et de Hanau, was brought under fire. The outpost group had four half tracks which were backed into position so that a cross-fire of 50 cal could be set to the area north of the hotel.

Assaults by the enemy forces were frustrated with the 50 cal vehicle weapons and small arms fire. Germans crumbled into the snow under the Americans' ~~volley~~¹ of fire.

One of the officers in the O.P. group called in German for the enemy to surrender. Six green-clad soldiers advanced with hands held high. The Americans held their fire and watched the Germans advance in the moonlight.

Other enemy forces opened fire on the surrendering soldiers. None of the Germans were hit however. They hit the ground and crawled over the snow to the American forces.

The P.W.s gave the information that they were part of an attacking force of battalion strength.²

The battle continued with American artillery (105 mm and 155 mm How) laying down a barrage on the enemy preventing any

1 Interview with "C" Co men.

2 Interview with 62d AIB Staff.

mass attempt at crossing the open terrain. Before the out-
post group became surrounded and cut off in their forward
position they were ordered to withdraw to the main line of
resistance along the Bannstein highway.¹

The outpost group was forced to withdraw under heavy small
arms, machine gun and bazooka fire. The enemy followed in hot
pursuit and succeeded in infiltrating through the eastern
section of "C" Company's lines. A squad of Germans called out
in English, "Hold fire!" Thinking the enemy intended to sur-
render the GI's discontinued firing. But soon took up their
fire again when the enemy used the ruse to gain better posi-
tions.²

The scene was one of confusion as the white clad, German
figures "romped all over the place" firing automatic weapons
and hollering, "Die - Yankee bastards" and "ganster-bitches".³

With the enemy forces threatening a complete encircle-
ment of the area, orders were issued to evacuate half-track
vehicles to Bannstein. The leading vehicle in the column was
struck by a German bazooka round. The infiltrating enemy only
fired one round before being chased by machine gun fire from a

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- 1 Interview with 62d AIB staff.
 - 2 Interview with "C" Co men.
 - 3 Interview with men of 62d AIB.

Vehicle to the rear.

The stricken vehicle pulled to the side of the road and the other half tracks ramed over the icy road with Bannstein as their destination. Behind them the foot troops of "C" Company gradually fell back toward the general direction of Bannstein.¹

The dismounted infantry men were ~~conscious~~^{aware} of enemy troops throughout the area as they struggled through the snow covered forest and hill terrain. The soldiers paused for a brief respite on the high ground northeast of Bannstein. After resting the men again took up their march toward Bannstein.²

Upon reaching the road block southeast of Bannstein established by the 117th Cav Rcn Platoon, the "C" Co men were fired upon by the friendly troops.³

A soldier of "C" Company called out, "Hold your fire and I'll give the pass word." The men at the road block held their fire and a GI crawled forward. He called into the darkness, "Baloney". The countersign from the cavlary unit was, "Dot". The rest of "C" company continued forward.

Upon reaching the outskirts of Bannstein, German armored vehicles were seen approaching the town from the north west.

1 Interview with men of "C" Company.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.

The American soldiers did not enter Bannstein but instead withdrew along the icy highway in the direction of Phillippsbourg.

Vehicles of the 117th and 94 Cavalry units were moving along the same highway toward the east. Tracks slide along the frozen road making progress slow and hazardous for vehicles and men.¹

Meanwhile other units of the 62nd AIB in the vicinity of Bellerstein, northeast of Bannstein, were infiltrated ~~with~~ ^{by} small groups of enemy soldiers who came down from the north. The fluid situation resulted in the forces being withdrawn to Bannstein where a defense was set up to control the open ground north and northwest of Bannstein. With 24 men and nine half-tracks set up in a perimeter defense, the Germans were held at bay. Attempts by enemy foot troops to cross the open terrain north of Bannstein were met with a ~~heavy volley~~ ^{heavy volume} of American machine gun and small arms fire. The Germans were "persistent" and continued to charge across the snow covered open field toward Bannstein. Firing automatic weapons and yelling in frenzied tones, "Yankee bastards --- Die sons-a-bitches," the enemy forces ~~continually~~ ^{again and again} tried to cross the bald surface. The Americans successfully held the enemy off

1 Interview with men of 62nd AIB.

until the morning hours of New Year's Day.¹

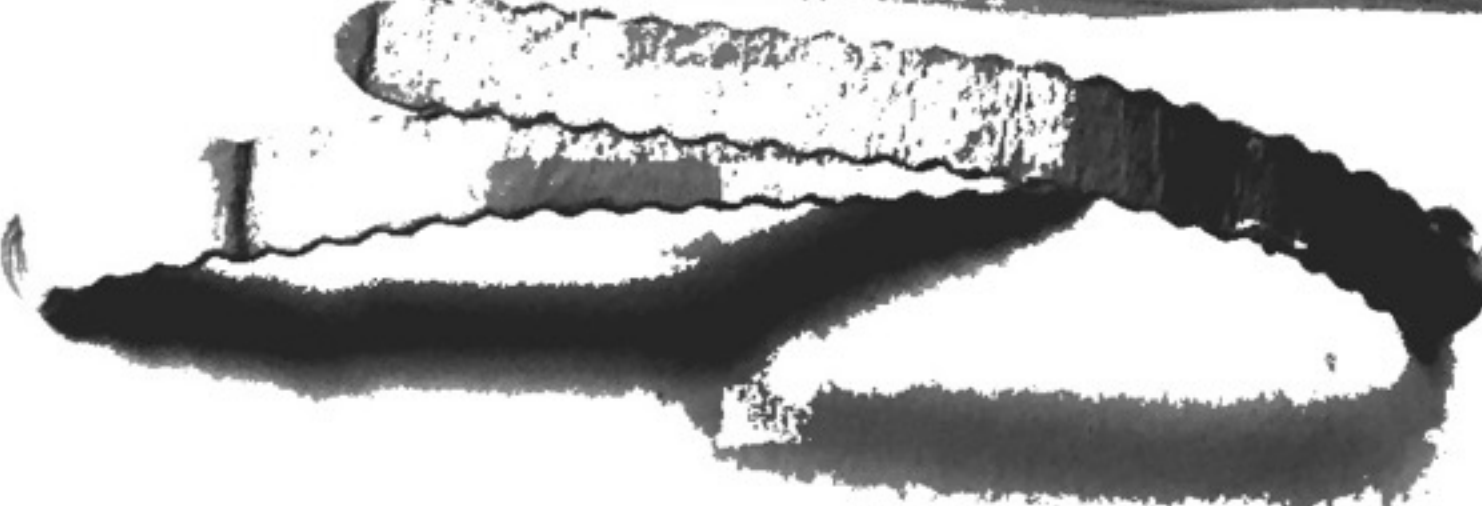
During the morning of 1 January the Germans reinforced their foottroops with four armored vehicles and began destroying the buildings in Bannstein with flat trajectory cannon fire.

Bazooka rounds were fired in the direction of the enemy armor but failed to explode because of the freezing temperature.²

Enemy pressure was mounting continually. At 1130 on 1 January the troops in Bannstein began withdrawing. The Germans however had surrounded the town and with flat trajectory fire prevented any vehicles from leaving the town. The friendly troops began evacuating in groups of 2 and 3, leaving approximately 15 ^{half} ~~one~~ tracks, two 1/2 ton trucks and several jeeps in Bannstein.³

Those men that had German "souvenirs" on their person hastily threw them away in the face of what seemed imminent capture. To the east of Bannstein tanks and tank-destroyers of the 62 AIB, 94 Cav Rcn Sqdn and the 117th Cav Rcn Sqdn held off enemy attempts to gain the main highway, while the foot troops in Bannstein withdrew across the hill woodland toward Baerenthal.⁴

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1. Interview with men of 62nd AIB.
 2. Interview with "C" Co men who said, "We later found that when the ends of the bazooka rounds are headed they will explode upon contact."
 3. Group interview with "C" Co men.
 4. Interviews with 62 AIB and 94th Cav Rcn Sqdn staffs.



When "C" Company received their initial attack, "A" and "B" Companies (62 ATR), to the east of "C" Company, were also¹ besieged by approximately 300 enemy at midnight 31 December 1944.

4.2 mortar rounds from the 83d Chemical harassed the invading horde in the vicinity of the open ground around Neunhoffen. In "A" Company's area the mortar rounds were causing tree bursts too close to the friendly troops so the fire was withheld. "A" Company contained the Germans with machine guns, hand grenades and small arms fire.

The see-saw engagement continued for the remainder of the night until it became evident that the enemy had succeeded in infiltrating behind "A" and "B" Company's positions. At dawn the Germans began firing wooden bullets into the rear of the² troops positions.

"B" Company pulled back and flanked the rear of "A" Company clearing out the infiltrators. "A" Company then established themselves in a line with "B" Company and again held the Germans. 75 mm cannons of the American armored vehicles were brought into play and supplemented 42mm mortar fire barrages on the enemy who were persistently attempting to storm the dug-in Americans.

Five enemy tanks were reported to have broken through somewhere north of Phillipsbourg and proceeding toward Phillipsbourg on the main highway. If true, this action would mean that "A" and "B" Companies were threatened with being cut off from the rear.

1 Interview with "A" and "B" Company men.

2 Ibid.

To counteract the enemy armor menace, two tanks, the A.T. platoon (57 mm) and two bazooka teams established a road block¹ northwest of Phillipsbourg.

The enemy armor penetration never materialized in the sector reported. But German infantry ~~troops~~^{an} did make ~~their~~ appearance in the valley, northeast of Phillipsbourg. The armor and infantry fired upon a large group of enemy troops in the valley. An unknown number were killed and 150 were forced into captivity.

Just after this action, elements of the 275th Infantry relieved the infantrymen of Hedelson Task Force and established defensive positions in an east west line, north of Phillipsbourg.

To the north of "A" and "B" Companies the enemy charges were stalled with mortar, machine gun and small arms, chasing the enemy back to Neunhoffer.

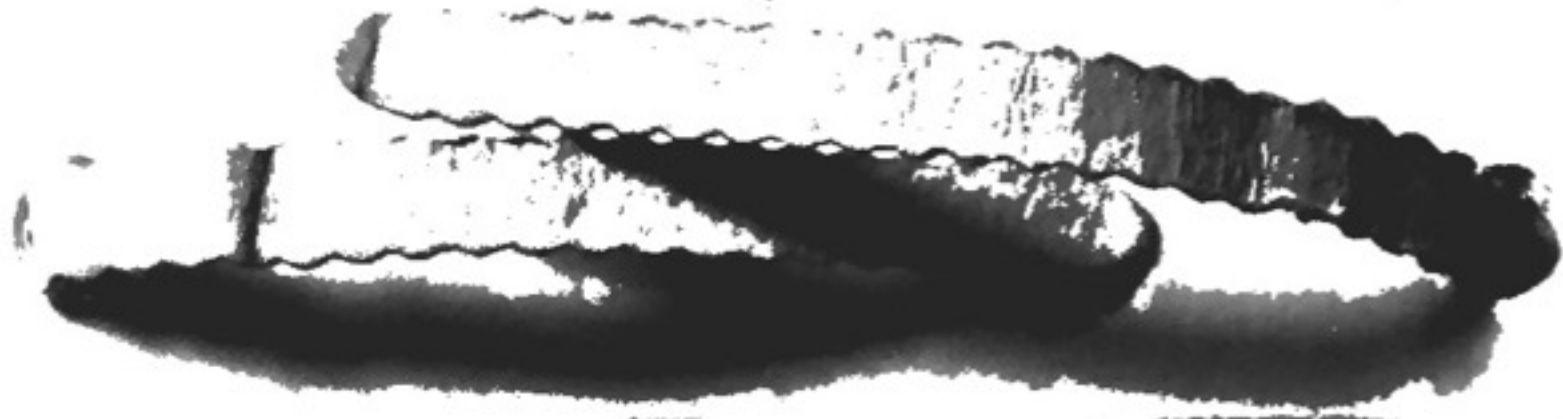
Thus by morning of 1 January the enemy's thrust, had carried its weight to Bannstein and was threatening Baerenthal and Phillipsbourg.

Liaison between units by this time was lost. ~~The situation~~² as to where neighboring units were unknown.

Reinforcements were requested by the Task Force Commander. Word was received that the 19 AIB and "A" Co of the 25th Tank Bn were enroute to Baerenthal. The 19th AIB arrived in Baerenthal at approximately 0800 on 1 January and the bn less one

¹ Interview with 62d AIB staff.

² History CC "R", 14th Armored Division, 9 January 1945.



company was ordered to counterattack on the left flank of the task force in the 117th Cav zone. They were to restore the main line of resistance in that sector which had been overrun in some parts. The other company of the 19th AIB was to attack in the vicinity of Bannstein in order to relieve pressure on "C" Co of the 62 AIB.¹

The 19th AIB met with only limited success against the enemy assault which had by this time grown to sizeable proportions.²

Meanwhile, the friendly troops in Bannstein were isolated since the enemy had cut the main highway leading from Bannstein to Phillipsbourg.

American foot troops and vehicles began moving southward from Bannstein on the road to Fournear Neuf (vic 43.0-81.0)

The enemy by this time had broken through the outer defenses of Bannstein and were shelling the town with artillery and mortar fire. The men were ordered to evacuate Bannstein with all possible haste by infiltration. Since the roads were icy and hazardous the men took to the woods and hills³ toward Zinswiller. GI's helped each other along across the snow covered and hilly terrain. Small groups of Americans were ever-cautious of enemy patrols, which by this time had control of the Bannstein-Phillipsbourg highway and the area immediately south thereof.⁴

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1. Interview with H.T.F. staff.
 2. CC "R" History, 14th Armored Division, 9 January 1945.
 3. Interview with "C" Co men.
 4. Interview with men of 62d AIB.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Situated between the 117th Cav Rcn Sqdn and the 62d AIF was the 94th Cav Rcn Sqdn, holding the central portion of Task Force Hudelson's main line of resistance.¹

Before the midnight enemy assault, patrolling missions of the 94th Cav had previously penetrated as far as Stockbronn and the high ground overlooking the Camp de Bitché. Enemy positions were found to be dug in the wooded terrain near Equelshardt.² Reconnaissance patrols ran into German manned road blocks of fallen trees and machine guns, which prevented further action northward.

Enemy patrols were also active, destroying American equipment and capturing personnel, ~~for the apparent reason of interrogation~~.

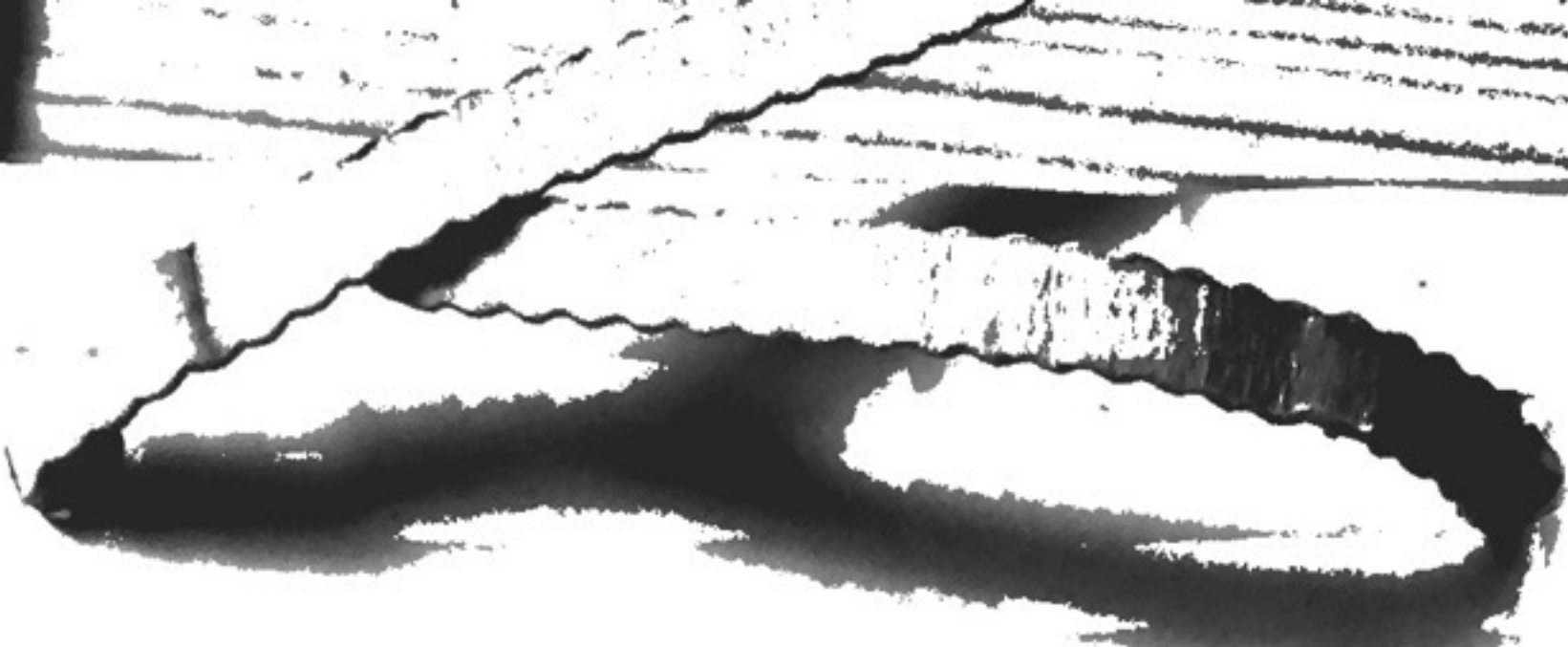
Activity was heard in the vicinity of Camp de Bitché during the day of 31 December 1944. German armor and rail~~road~~^{way} trains were audible, indicating the movement of enemy troops or equipment. Artillery fire was laid on the area of the Camp and soon quieted the hostile activity.³

Shortly after midnight, on the last day of 1944, German forces attacked in the 94th Cav area. Trip flares along the entire front were set off by the enemy. After this action there was comparative quiet until approximately 0300, 1 January, when considerable small arms fire^{was heard} to the west, in the 117th Cav zone,
~~the enemy was heard to fire~~

1 Interview with M.F.H. Staff.

2 Interview with 94th Cav Sqdn staff.

~~3~~ 4 94th Cav Journal, 31 December 1944.


C and D troop received orders to withdraw to a secondary position to stem the enemy advance. While "B" troop covered with machine gun fire from their armored vehicles, "D" troops infiltrated to a secondary line of defense. Several armored vehicles had to be abandoned because they could not get through the snow covered woods. Tank crewmen removed the machine guns from the vehicles and carried the weapons back with them¹

Relieving elements of the 19th AIB began to push through the 94th Cav Rcn but met with only local success. Assault cannons of the 94th Cav Rcn supported the 19th AIB's foot troops but the momentum of the enemy's drive was pushing forward relentlessly, driving back everything in its path.

By afternoon 1 January, the 94th Cav Sqdn reached its secondary MLP on the road running from Mouterhouse to Baerenthal only to find this defensive set-up already cut by the enemy.²

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Breaking up into small groups the cavalry units used what defilade and cover could be found in the forests, ^{to} move across country toward Sarreinsberg. Infantrymen of the 19th AIB covered the withdrawal of the 94th Cav troops.

Thus the enemy had penetrated to a position where ~~the~~ lines of communication were denied to ~~the~~ friendly forces on the phillipsbourg-Baerenthal and Mouterhouse-Baerenthal roads.³

American forces, infiltrating south, in the face of the enemy drive, had been dispatched in small groups, some of

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- 1 Interview with men of 94th Cav Sqdn.
 - 2 Interview with 94th Cav Sqdn staff.
 - 3 CC "B" History.

which were methodically mopped up by the hostile forces.¹

At 1200 on 1 January the Task Force Headquarters CP in Baerenthal was surrounded and receiving hostile artillery and small arms fire. Communication with subordinate units was impossible since artillery fire had cut the wires. Radio attempts with all units failed except for the 62 AIB which reported strong enemy attacks overrunning "C" Co but "A" and "D" Co's still holding out.²

Fighting off the enemy with small arms and machine gun fire, the Task Force CP contained the German forces until relief came with the appearance of tanks from the 25th Tank Bn.

Advancing over the icy terrain the armored unit destroyed the German forces surrounding Baerenthal. One platoon of medium tanks was then dispatched to relieve pressure on the 62d AIB in the vicinity of Phillipsbourg. ~~Armor was not sent to Mouterhouse to aid the situation there because the enemy had a strong road block between the towns.~~ The cavalry predicament around Mouterhouse was not known by the Task Force Commander since communication was out. The immediate decision of relieving pressure on the right flank was made, so that control could be gained over "at least part of the sector".³

The 62d AIB successfully held their lines in the Phillipsbourg area and established defensive positions once more with

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- 1 Interview with 94th Cav Sqn staff.
 - 2 Interview with TFF staff.
 - 3 History CC "P".

the additional armor support from the 25th Tank Bn.

Enemy shelling continued to harass the American positions throughout the afternoon of 1 January, but the fire was unobserved and caused no great damage.¹

At dusk on 1 January the 275th Infantry began relieving elements of Task Force Hudelson by order of VI Corps Headquarters. The Task Force was ordered south to the vicinity of Reipertswiller to stabilize a defensive position in that area against impending enemy thrusts.²

Radio messages were sent out to all the Task Force Troops with instructions to fall back upon relief and assemble in the vicinity of Zinswiller. Since wire and radio communication³ was out with the cavalry units they could not be contacted.

When the Task Force Headquarters reached Reipertswiller, the commanding officer immediately dispatched the remaining elements of "A" Co (19th AIB) and "A" Co (125th Eng) to positions one mile above town on the road leading due north from Reipertswiller. These troops were attacked by what later proved to be an enemy force of battalion strength, but the men held their ground and prevented the hostile force from reaching Reipertswiller.

The 275th Infantry continued to relieve troops of Hudelson Task Force during the night of 1 January and morning 2 January. The 19th AIBn held its position in Sarrebourg for a period of ten days. The 117th and 94th Cavalry units had fallen back to a line running generally Sarrebourg-Wingen-Plimmenau before the

1 Interview with T.F.H. Staff.
2 History CC "B".
3 Interview with T.F.H. Staff.

relief was effected. The 62d AIB could not be relieved until the following day because of the ~~hazardous~~ icy terrain and the fact that the 62d was in close contact with the enemy in their area.¹

With the alleviation of their positions by the 275th Inf, Task Force Fudelson was dissolved as per instructions from VI Corps Headquarters which put the official time of liquidation effective 0001 on 2 January 1945.²

The Germans had paid heavily in their New Year's Eve assault on the American lines. They gained several thousand yards of terrain in the attack but the cost had been great in number of casualties inflicted on his forces. Some estimates placed the figure as high as 1,500 along the Task Force front, which limited the penetration south through the Vosges mountain to merely local gains instead of its anticipated large scale campaign.³

1 History CC "R".

2 Ibid.

3 ~~Interview with TPN staff and History CC "R".~~